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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6164  
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3478  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7339  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4601  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0035  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1855  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1896  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 1807  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4065  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0446  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4491  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9066  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0252  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002719

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2016  
TAGS: [ECON](#) [EMIN](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: DEADLY MINING CLASH CONTINUES

REF: LA PAZ 2698

Classified By: Ambassador Philip Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### Summary

1. (C) Summary: Fighting between cooperative miners and workers of the state-owned mining company COMIBOL broke out in Huanuni on October 5 (reftel) and continued on the 6th, despite temporary truces agreed on October 5 and 6. At this time, it appears that the second truce is holding and that fighting has ceased. Press reports indicate 16 confirmed dead and 61 wounded. Embassy contacts say there are an unknown number of miners trapped in the mine. The 700 unarmed police sent in by the GOB reportedly have restored calm. Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera has been criticized for allegedly offering to "send coffins," rather than the military, to Huanuni. Both sides are blaming the GOB for the conflict. End summary.

#### Mining Conflict Background

2. (SBU) The state-owned mining company COMIBOL has operated the Posokoni mine in Huanuni, Oruro, the country's main tin deposit, since the nationalization of the mines in 1952. During the 1980s, after the price of tin dropped, many mines were closed, COMIBOL was reduced in size, and many miners migrated to the East. Those miners that remained, and those that have recently returned due to rising tin prices, formed private cooperatives to eke out a living with rudimentary mining techniques. The MAS administration has made promises to the cooperative miners of providing them equipment and allowing them to mine portions of state-owned mining areas, including Posokoni. On October 4, COMIBOL sent a letter to the cooperative miners informing them that it was not possible to transfer shares of the Huanuni Mining Company to

them.

#### Truce Has Stopped the Violence for Now

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13. (C) On October 5, fighting broke out between independent cooperative miners and workers of COMIBOL (reftel). Late on October 6, the press reported that 16 people were confirmed dead and 61 wounded in the fighting between 4,000 cooperative miners and 1,200 workers of COMIBOL in Huanuni, Oruro. Congressman Nagatani told Emboff that an unknown number of miners are trapped in the mine and that the cooperative miners had destroyed the oxygen generators. A GOB commission consisting of the minister of the presidency, the president of the human rights assembly, and the national ombudsman reached a peace agreement with the leaders of both mining sectors in the evening of October 5, but the agreement broke down as fighting broke out again on the morning of the 6th, with COMIBOL workers demanding the mining minister's resignation and cooperative miners raining dynamite down from the hills onto Huanuni houses. The ministers of government and defense announced on the 6th that 700 police were being sent to stop the fighting and create conditions for dialogue, and later in the afternoon, the government again announced that a truce had been brokered. According to Embassy contacts, the unarmed police entered Huanuni, and were initially unable to quell the fighting, but did in the end provide room for the peace deal that was brokered late on the 6th.

14. (SBU) The Bolivian Workers' Union (COB) and the Cooperative Miners' Federation (FINCOMIN) convened their affiliates in the city of Oruro in the afternoon of October 16. Many miners live in Oruro and many traveled from other parts of the country. Conflicts involving the use of dynamite erupted in the city, but there were no reports of wounded people.

#### Miners Blame GOB for Violence

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15. (SBU) Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera reportedly initially responded to the conflict by stating that ambition, greed, and a desire for exclusive control over the tin from the Posokoni mine were the sources of the deaths. He even has been alleged to have said that the government would not send in the military or police, but would send coffins. He told the press that, since March, the government had conducted at least 16 meetings with the cooperative and state miners during which the GOB had presented various proposals for joint exploitation of the Posokoni mine, but they were all rejected. Both sides in the conflict blamed the government, including Mining Minister Villarroel, Vice President Garcia Linera, and President Morales, for the violence. It is notable in this regard that President Morales has yet to speak publicly about the events, leaving this duty to his vice president.

16. (C) Comment: The deaths in Huanuni, just one week after the cocalero deaths in Carrasco National Park, are more evidence of the Morales administration's weakening grip on the nation's simmering conflicts. The president's complete silence and the vice president's callous approach in the lead up to the emergency will likely tarnish the public's opinion of the leaders. The GOB's sending in of unarmed police demonstrates the government's reluctance to use force and awareness of the dangers conflicts such as these pose for the government. (Previous administrations have fallen as a result of similar explosions of violence, and mismanaged responses to them.) It remains to be seen if the truce will hold, but it is certain that the political repercussions of Huanuni will continue to haunt this administration. End comment.

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